

State Profile

History

People have lived in West Virginia as far back as 12,500 years ago, beginning with the Paleo-Indians. The Fort Ancient Indians inhabited the area until 300 years ago when they were driven out by the Iroquois Indians from New York and the great Lakes area. When the first European settlers arrived, all the native American villages were gone, and the area was a hunting ground used by many tribes including the Cherokee, Shawnee, and Iroquois.

The first permanent European settlement dates from 1731 when Morgan Morgan founded Mill Creek. In 1742, coal was discovered on the Coal River, an event that would be of great significance in determining West Virginia's future.

West Virginia shares its history with Virginia from 1609 to 1861 until Virginia seceded from the Union in 1861. Then the delegates of 40 western counties formed their own government, which was granted statehood in 1863. Declared a state by President Abraham Lincoln, West Virginia is the only state to be designated by Presidential Proclamation.

Capital City

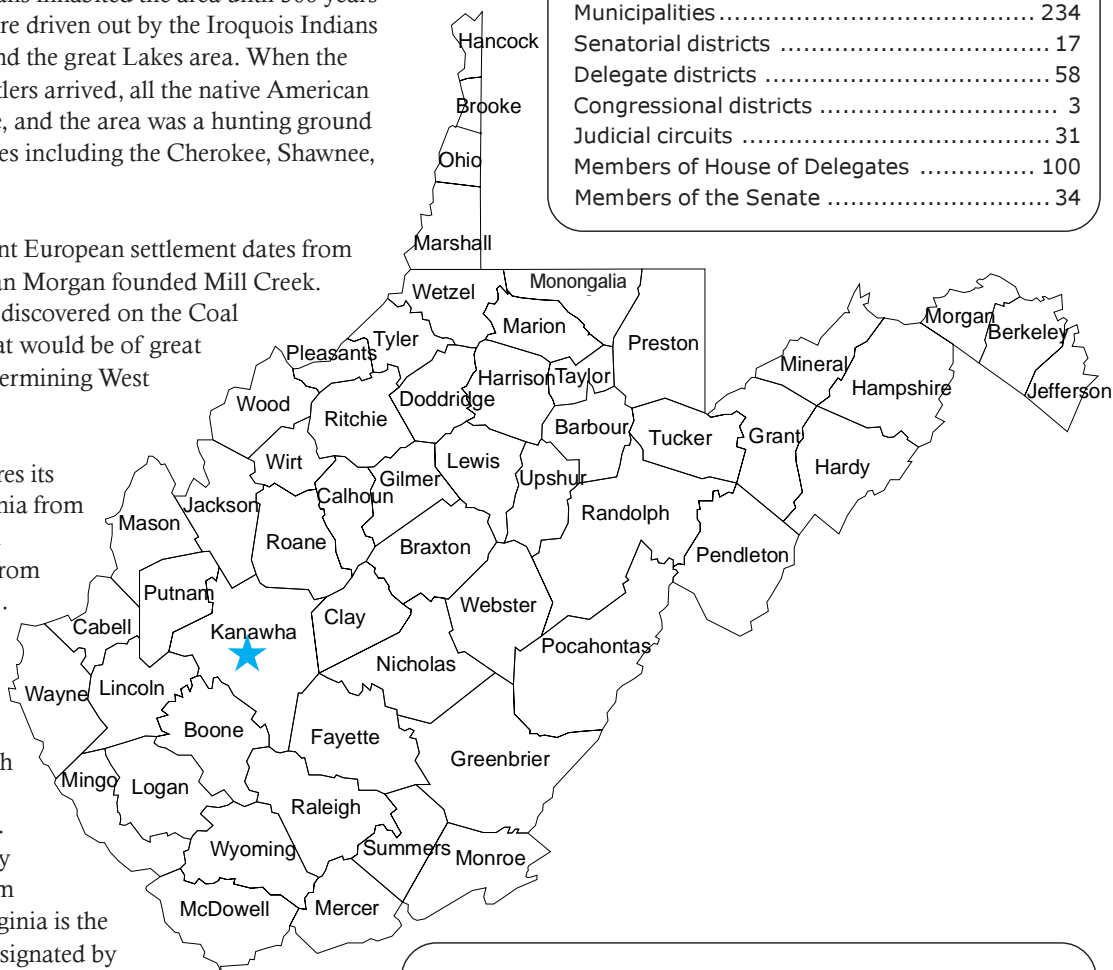
When West Virginia became a state in 1863, the capital was located in Wheeling.

The State Legislature designated Charleston as the capital city in 1870. Kanawha county citizens provided a passenger boat to move all state records to their new home in Charleston.

In 1875, the Legislature voted to return the capital to Wheeling. Although state officials boarded steamers on May 21 to journey to Wheeling, State archives and records did not arrive until late September, causing state government to be at a standstill for four months.

Geographical Data

Area (square miles) land and water	24,231.4
Counties	55
Municipalities	234
Senatorial districts	17
Delegate districts	58
Congressional districts	3
Judicial circuits	31
Members of House of Delegates	100
Members of the Senate	34



State capital	Charleston, Kanawha County
Youngest county in state	Mingo (1895)
Oldest county	Hampshire (1754)
Smallest county	Hancock (area 88.2 sq. mi.)
Largest county	Randolph (area 1,040 sq. mi.)
Highest point in state	Spruce Knob (4,861 ft.)
Lowest point in state	Harpers Ferry (247 ft.)
Geographical center of state	near Sutton, Braxton County
Center of population	near Gassaway, Braxton County

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In 1877, the Legislature decided that the citizens would choose between Charleston, Martinsburg, and Clarksburg for a permanent capital location. As a result, it was proclaimed that eight years hence, Charleston would be the government's permanent seat, and State officials again boarded a boat to move from Wheeling to Charleston, towing a barge containing the State records, papers, and library.

Capitol Building

The new capitol opened in May 1885 and served until its destruction by fire on January 3, 1921. For the next six years West Virginia state government was run from a "pasteboard capitol," a temporary structure built hastily in the wake of the fire. Although this structure was also destroyed by fire in 1927, the present capitol was already under construction on the north bank of the Kanawha River.

This new building, designed by Cass Gilbert, was completed in 1932 at a cost of \$10 million. In 1912, Gilbert had designed the world's first skyscraper, the Woolworth Building in New York City. His other works include the state capitols of Arkansas and Minnesota, and the U.S. Supreme Court Building and the U.S. Treasury Building in Washington, D.C.

The exterior of the capitol, built in the classical style, is of buff Indiana limestone. The 293 foot gold dome atop the structure is five feet higher than the dome of the U.S. Capitol and is gilded in 14 karat gold leaf applied to the copper and lead roof in tiny 3 3/8 inch squares. Currently undergoing structural repairs, including regilding, the dome should be completed in two years at a cost of \$4.6 million. Two-thirds of the capitol interior is made of four different kinds of marble. The rotunda section and two wings provide 535,000 square feet of floor space and house 333 rooms.

Economic Base

The state ranks second in the nation in coal production, producing 13% of the U.S. total. Annual coal production was 145,899,599 tons in 2003. West Virginia also is a leader in the chemical, steel, aluminum, natural gas, oil, and hardwood lumber industries. The state's diverse economic base also includes the energy, plastics, transportation equipment, biomedical technology, and distribution industries.

West Virginia's forest resources contribute to at least one facet of the forest industry in each county, employing 30,000 people and contributing gross sales of \$3.2 billion to the state's economy. According to a 2000 inventory conducted by the U.S. Forest Service, the state remains 78% forested, even though the timber harvest has doubled since the last inventory. Species of oak comprise 48% of harvested wood. With 12 million acres, West Virginia is the third most heavily forested state in the nation.

West Virginia is one of the largest producers of oil and natural gas east of the Mississippi River. It has produced significant amounts of natural gas in the Appalachian Basin. Production in 2003 was 188,022 million cubic feet of natural gas and 1.2 million barrels of oil.

West Virginia has 20,800 family farms generating approximately \$449 million in annual commodity sales. Major agricultural commodities include poultry, cattle, dairy products, hay, and apples. The West Virginia Grown program continues to expand with an annual impact of \$100 million from value-added products that use renewable resources to directly reach consumers.

A West Virginia visitor study released in 2003 by the Division of Tourism, revealed that the number of visitors in 2002 increased 8.5% to 23.9 million, staying an average of 3.26 days. Direct spending by tourists in 2002 was \$3.5 billion, up from \$3.1 billion in 2001. A study released January 2004 by the Division of Tourism indicated that for the \$3 million the state spent on tourism advertising, it received \$27 million in taxes, a nine-to-one return on investment.

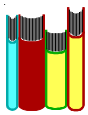
Services



In 2004, there were 230 law enforcement agencies in West Virginia—one of those agencies was the State Police with 62 detachments, and another was the Division of Natural Resources with 55 detachments. There were 3,202 full-time sworn law enforcement officers—3,105 men and 97 women (including 29 officers with the Fire Marshall's Office)—an average of 1.8 for each 1,000 inhabitants.



West Virginia has 446 fire departments—417 of these are volunteer fire departments, 13 career departments (fully paid), and 16 are a combination of paid and volunteer. There are a total of 11,147 fire fighters—870 paid and 10,277 volunteers.



West Virginia's 172 public libraries contain over five million items in print, audio, video, and electronic format and provide public Internet access and access to at least ten on-line databases. Annually, West Virginians visit their public libraries 6,086,832 times, borrow over seven million items, and use library electronic resources 1,156,238 times. The State assists libraries with services, including \$4.06 per capita grants-in aid, technology support, and on-line databases.



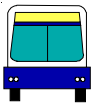
West Virginia has 775 public schools, 24,069 professional personnel, and 13,266 school service personnel within 55 county school systems. More than 62% of the teaching force has a master's degree or higher. Two hundred and four West Virginia teachers have also earned National Board Certification, the highest credential for teachers.



There are 3,500 practicing physicians in West Virginia, as well as 22,000 active registered nurses, 73 hospitals and medical centers, 35 primary care organizations with 97 clinical sites, 47 school-based health centers, and 49 local boards of health with 54 health departments serving all the counties. There are 11 free primary care clinics, and residents can access services in 54 DHHR county offices.



Of the 38,918 miles of public roads in West Virginia, 35,866 miles are on the state highway system, along with 6,636 bridges, of which 4,507 are 100 feet or less in length. West Virginia has four nationally designated scenic byways: the Coal Heritage Trail, the Highland Scenic Highway, Washington Heritage Trail, and the Midland Trail, as well as one All American Road (the National Road following US 40 from the Ohio state line across Ohio County to the Pennsylvania line).



West Virginia's Division of Public Transit oversees 17 transit systems that employ 464 full-time and 111 part-time workers. The buses traveled 9,423,732 miles and carried a total of 4,597,841 passengers of which 1,010,793 were elderly or disabled.



There are 32 airports in the state, but only nine of them are commercial airports. Currently, Jackson County Maritime Center is the only public port in West Virginia. Five public intermodal ports are in the planning process—they will be located in Kanawha, Putnam, Wayne, and Wood counties. Three additional potential public intermodal port sites are being studied in Fayette, Mason, and Tyler counties.



Route miles of railroad operated within West Virginia totaled 2,488 miles at the end of 2002—183.4 miles were owned by the State. Trains hauled 2,632,546 carloads of freight, a total of 216,739,681 tons. Of all freight originated in the state and hauled by rail, 95% was coal.

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Miscellaneous

The biggest threat to West Virginia's forests is fire. In a ten-year period from 1986 to 1995, forest fires burned a yearly average of 97,470 acres. The damage during that ten-year period, including damage to homes, structures, and other land, has been computed to be \$21,630,577.



The third-largest diamond ever found in the United States, the “Punch” Jones Diamond, was found near Peterstown, in Monroe County within one-half mile of the Virginia state line. It has been suggested that the diamond actually occurred in rocks in Virginia and that erosion carried it to the West Virginia side of the state line. There are no other likely sites for diamonds in this state.

No other precious gems are known to have been found in West Virginia. Among the few gemstones found in West Virginia are some opal, some types of quartz, and two coal or coal-like minerals which, though softer than most gemstones, are cut, polished, and carved into jewelry.

A variety of the yellow apple, the Golden Delicious, originated in Clay County. The original Grimes Golden Apple Tree was discovered in 1775 near Wellsburg.

The first steamboat was launched by James Rumsey in the Potomac River at New Mecklenburg (Shepherdstown) on December 3, 1787.

On February 14, 1824, at Harpers Ferry, John S. Gallaher published the “Ladies Garland,” one of the first papers in the nation devoted mainly to the interests of women.

One of the first suspension bridges in the world was completed in Wheeling in November 1849.

Bailey Brown, the first Union soldier killed in the Civil War, died on May 22, 1861, at Fetterman, Taylor County.

A naval battle was fought in West Virginia waters during the Civil War. United States Navy armored steamers were actively engaged in the Battle of Buffington Island near Ravenswood on July 19, 1863.



Mother's Day was first observed at Andrews Church in Grafton on May 10, 1908.

The first rural free mail delivery began in Charles Town, October 6, 1896, then spread across the United States.

Outdoor advertising had its origin in Wheeling about 1908 when the Block Brothers Tobacco Company painted bridges and barns with the wording: “Treat Yourself to the Best, Chew Mail Pouch.”

West Virginia was the first state to have a sales tax. It became effective July 1, 1921.

Mrs. Minnie Buckingham Harper, a member of the House of Delegates by appointment in 1928, was the first African American woman to become a member of a legislative body in the United States.

West Virginia's Memorial Tunnel was the first in the nation to be monitored by television. It opened November 8, 1954.

West Virginia was the first state to use new technology to “measure” and store electronically the face and fingertip images of licensed drivers. Because this recorded information is unique to each individual, these images can prevent stolen identity should a driver's license be lost or taken.

The longest steel arch bridge (1,700 feet) in the United States is the New River Gorge Bridge in Fayette County.

Organ Cave, near Ronceverte, is the third largest cave in the United States and the largest in the state.

West Virginia has an mean altitude of 1,500 feet, giving it the highest average altitude east of the Mississippi.

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Major Points of Interest

- **Harpers Ferry**—In addition to its fabulous scenery, Harpers Ferry was the site of the first successful application of interchangeable manufacture, the arrival of the first successful American railroad, John Brown's attack on slavery, the largest surrender of Federal troops during the Civil War, and the education of former slaves in one of the earliest integrated schools in the United States.
- **New River Gorge National River**—Encompassing over 70,000 acres of land along the New River, this national park protects 53 miles of free-flowing water. The gorge, carved by the world's second-oldest river, has been dubbed the "Grand Canyon of the East." A new eco-friendly visitor center opened near Sandstone in 2003.
- **The Greenbrier Resort**—The Greenbrier is a AAA Five-Diamond, award-winning resort nestled on 6,500 acres in the scenic Allegheny Mountains in White Sulphur Springs. This world-renowned getaway offers more than 50 activities, including three 18-hole championship golf courses, a golf academy, a Land Rover driving school, a gallery of fine shops, and a host of traditional amenities that have distinguished the resort for over 200 years. In 2003, readers of *Conde Nast Traveler* magazine voted the Greenbrier one of the "Best of the Best" golf resorts in the world; The 2004 Andrew Harper Hideaway Report named it the number one U.S. resort.
- **Berkeley Springs**—Long before the first Europeans discovered its warm waters, this region was already a famous health spa attracting Native Americans from Canada to the Carolinas. George Washington even slept here. Today, Berkeley Springs offers state-of-the-art spas, unique shops, and local arts.
- **West Virginia Scenic Railroads**—West Virginia features more than 80 railroad attractions, including the world-famous Cass Scenic Railroad State Park and the Mountain State Mystery Train and New River Gorge excursions. There's also diesel favorites like the Potomac Eagle excursions, on which passengers enjoy a 90% chance of seeing a bald eagle. There's also the recently expanded Durbin and Greenbrier Valley Railroad. The state is steeped in railroad traditions and there are a number of historic facilities that mark this culture.
- **Stonewall Resort**—The latest development in state park facilities sits along the shore of the state's second-largest impoundment, Stonewall Jackson Lake and features an Arnold Palmer-designed championship golf course, lodge, deluxe cottages, houseboat rentals, and spa. In 2004, the resort opened a golf clubhouse and restaurant and added a 125-passenger excursion boat for dinner and sightseeing cruises.
- **Tamarack**—Tamarack is the nation's first and only statewide collection of handmade craft, art, and cuisine showcasing "The Best of West Virginia" from hand-carved furniture to glass, from pottery to Appalachian quilts and more. Tamarack offers regional specialty foods and products, as well as performances, craft demonstrations, shopping, theater, art gallery, and a food court managed by The Greenbrier.
- **Oglebay Resort and the Winter Festival of Lights**—Oglebay is a 1,650-acre resort with abundant recreational activities, deluxe accommodations, a zoo, gardens, and shops nestled in the hills surrounding Wheeling. The resort features three golf courses and is home to America's largest light show, the Winter Festival of Lights. More than one million visitors and 3,000 tour buses visit the park and city each year to experience the show. In winter 2004, Oglebay reopened its downhill skiing area after a seven-year absence. A new triple-chair lift and snowmaking equipment will add to the resort's four-seasons appeal.
- **Huntington**—In November 2004, officials opened Pullman Square, a new \$60 million retail, dining, and entertainment complex in downtown Huntington. The facility features a state-of-the-art stadium seating cinema complex, bookstore, themed restaurants, comedy club, and retail shops.
- **National Radio Astronomy Observatory at Green Bank**—Home of the Green Bank Telescope, the world's largest moveable radio telescope. Here researchers study the universe through natural radio emissions. A new \$7.2 million education center opened in 2003.

(Information on any of the points of interest is available by calling the West Virginia Division of Tourism toll-free at 1-800-CALL WVA or connecting to their Web site at <www.callwva.com>.)

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Famous West Virginians

Here is a sampling of the many famous West Virginians:

Randy Barnes (1966-) perhaps the world's greatest shot-putter. He holds both the outdoor and indoor world records and was a gold medalist in the 1996 Atlanta Olympics. He was born in Charleston, Kanawha County.

Pearl Buck (1892-1973), American novelist, born in Hillsboro, Pocahontas County. Many of her more than 85 books sympathetically portray China and its people. She was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature and the Pulitzer Prize for fiction.

Robert Carlyle Byrd (1917-) was elected in 2000 to an eighth consecutive term in the U.S. Senate. He was the majority leader of the Senate from 1977 to 1981 and from 1987 to 1989. Byrd is from Sophia, Raleigh County.

Bob Denver (1935-), who played "Gilligan" on the TV series *Gilligan's Island* and "Maynard G. Krebs" on the TV series *The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis*, lives near Princeton, Mercer County. His wife Dreama is from West Virginia.

Homer H. Hickam, Jr. (1943-) is the author of *Rocket Boys: A Memoir*, the story of his life in the little town of Coalwood, McDowell County, that inspired the number one bestseller and award-winning movie *October Sky*.

Thomas Jonathan "Stonewall" Jackson (1824-1863) was a general in the Confederacy during the Civil War and is considered among the most skillful tacticians in military history. He was born in Clarksburg (then Virginia).

Anna Jarvis (1864-1948) considered the founder of Mother's Day. Following the death of her own mother in 1905, she began campaigning to have one day a year set aside to honor mothers. In 1914 President Wilson signed a proclamation declaring Mother's Day a holiday. She was born near Grafton, Taylor County.

Don Jesse Knotts (1924-), television and movie actor, was born in Morgantown (Monongalia County) to a farm family he described as "dirt poor." He attended West Virginia University where he majored in speech, hoping to become a teacher. Knotts played the role of "Barney Fife" on the *Andy Griffith Show*.

Captain Jon A. McBride (1943-) became an astronaut in August 1979 and piloted the Challenger when it was launched on October 5, 1984. He was a Republican candidate for Governor of West Virginia in 1996. McBride was born in Charleston, Kanawha County.

Kathy Mattea (1959-), country music star, was born in South Charleston and grew up in Cross Lanes, Kanawha County.

John Forbes Nash Jr. (1928-), described as a mathematical genius who essentially lost 30 years of his life to paranoid schizophrenia and who re-emerged into public glory (once the disease was in remission) to receive the 1994 Nobel Prize in Economics for a brilliant doctoral dissertation begun in 1950 (from *A Beautiful Mind*, a biography of Nash by Sylvia Nasar that inspired a movie of the same name). Nash was born and reared in Bluefield, Mercer County.

Mary Lou Retton (1968-), gymnast who won four medals in the 1984 Summer Olympics, including the gold in the all-around gymnastics competition. She is from Fairmont, Marion County.

Jerome Alan "Jerry" West (1938-), a professional basketball star for the Los Angeles Lakers, was selected in 1996 as one of the 50 greatest National Basketball Association basketball players. He was born in Cabin Creek, Kanawha County.

Charles Elwood "Chuck" Yeager (1923-) became the first person to fly faster than the speed of sound in October 1947 and the first person to fly more than twice the speed of sound in December 1953. Yeager was born at Myra in Lincoln County.

For a more extensive list of famous West Virginians visit Jeff Miller's Famous West Virginians page at <http://members.aol.com/jeff560/westvirginia.html> >.